

L1 Influence on Learning Spoken English of Bangla Speakers

S. M. Ariful Islam*

Abstract: With a long historical background of contrastive analysis, language transfer, language distance and the Superset and the Subset Principles, L1 influence on learning the target language has been one of the significant domains of linguistic research. In this paper "L1 Influence on learning Spoken English of Bangla Speakers," I have intended to investigate how the L1 (Bangla) of L2 students plays role in their practical use of (L2) English. It is established in this essay that in every linguistic feature, e.g. morphology and semantics, syntax, phonetics and phonology, there is sufficient influence of Bangla language on spoken English among Bangla speakers. While this influence has been present in the speech of all subjects, it varies greatly from subject to subject depending on their success in learning.

1. Introduction

Previous learning experience always affects present activity and may either restrict or reinforce certain efforts in a learning situation. In a Second Language Learning Environment, learners are already possessed of their mother tongue (¹L1) which is likely to play some roles in the language learning tasks. With this view in mind, this paper intends to find L1 influence/s on learning Spoken English (²L2) of Bangladeshi students.

2. Theoretical framework

The framework for this investigation can be drawn from several theories put forward in Contrastive Analysis, Language Transfer, Native Language Influence, Language Distance, Superset Principle and Subset Principle. A brief overview of all these theories can be presented as follows.

2.1 Contrastive Analysis:

Influence of L1 in learning a second language has been addressed in the major research domain of Contrastive Analysis and Language Transfer. The field of Language Transfer has a long history of research data. Gass & Selinker quote Lado (1957:2) who has observed that

*. S. M. Ariful Islam, Lecturer, Department of English & Humanities, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh

... individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meaning of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture--- both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by the natives. (Gass & Selinker 1994:1)

Lado's view has contributed to the use of Contrastive Analysis (CA). Gass & Selinker (1994: 2) comment on Lado's definition of contrastive analysis as a way of comparing and contrasting various linguistic features of two languages; for example, sound systems, grammatical structures, vocabulary systems, writing systems, and above all cultural aspects of two languages. Results from contrastive analysis are valid and can be accepted but there are difficulties in interpreting this CA hypothesis in relation to learners' behaviour. For example, an English speaking learner of Italian tends to devoice the first member of the clusters [zm zn,zl], and then adjust them to the English clusters [sm sn sl]. Thus the CA hypothesis predicts learners' behaviour depending on some observational data of some learners under certain unspecified conditions. This is the main limitation of the CA hypothesis. According to Gass & Selinker, such prediction of learners' behaviour is made "without careful description and analytical studies of second language learners"(1994: 2). Again Fisiak (1980: 1) emphasizes linguistic descriptions and has said that comparison between languages should be made to determine similarities and dissimilarities between them. But analyzing two languages in various linguistic aspects like semantics, syntax, phonetics and phonology is clearly different from studying what influences a speaker of one language might have in learning the other.

2.2 Language Transfer:

Gass & Selinker (1994: 3) view that in spite of this limitation of the CA hypothesis it can be a good start in understanding all the probable ranges of transfer from one language to another. But the term 'transfer' is rather controversial due to what it actually means and what it does not mean. Odlin (1989: 27) defines transfer as "the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired." But Kellerman (1983) views the question of transfer differently. In a comment about Kellerman's definition of transfer, Gass & Selinker (1994: 7) point out that Kellerman has focused on the transferability of linguistic elements and constraints on transfer. These constraints on transfer are not merely similarities and differences but are beyond those which involve learners' active participation in taking decisions "about what can and cannot be transferred" (1994: 7).

Odlin (1989: 25) has also given a description of transfer in negative perspective:

- (a) Transfer is not a result of habit formation since behaviourists' idea of transfer is quite different from the idea of native language influence. Behaviorists believe in the extermination of earlier habits while learning a new one. But this is not the case in language learning as learners do not forget or get rid of their first language.
- (b) Transfer is not interference or hindrance only, it can also facilitate in learning a second language. When there are more similarities between two languages, the target language can easily be learnt with little effort. For example, a Spaniard can learn English more easily than an Arab since similarity between Spanish and English allows greater flexibility in language learning tasks. To Odlin, interference is similar to 'negative transfer' in meaning although he prefers to use 'negative transfer' of the two terms "since it can be contrasted with positive transfer, which is the facilitating influence of cognate vocabulary or any other similarities between native and target language" (1989: 26).
- (c) Transfer is not the same as retreating to one's native language during difficulty in using the target language.
- (d) Transfer can be the influence of all the languages, rather than only of the native language, known to a learner while he or she is learning the target language.

Odlin(1989: 36) has also given a detailed classification of various outcomes depending on the type of transfer. They can be summarized as:

- (a) Positive transfer facilitates learning of target language, depending on its similarities with the native language. It can result in an assimilation or concurrence of linguistic behaviour or features between target and native language e.g. similarities in word order can help in learning the syntax of the target language.
- (b) Negative transfer is the result of differences between target and native language and can result in errors, underproduction (using very few or no examples of the target language, also termed as avoidance), overproduction (for avoiding tough grammatical rules i.e. relative clause, the learner may create too many simple sentences), miscomprehension due to misperceptions of target language sound, or native and target language word order differences.

2.3 Native Language Influence:

Corder (1994: 19) does not agree to use the term transfer or interference for native language influence. According to him these are theoretical terms different from those used in discussing native language influence and one should therefore

be careful in using them. He claims that the presence of native language features in the use of the target language can be explained without using the term 'transfer'. To him transfer is a process which can be found only in laboratory experiments and mostly in relation to "sensorimotor behaviour and rote learning" but "nothing remotely comparable with the complexity of language behaviour..."(1994: 19). Again, he believes that interference is nothing but the use of L1 rules in the target language which is not accepted or which produces wrong structures. Since there is no inhibiting process in this type of L1 usage, the term interference should not be used in this particular case of L1 influence. He further says that there are some native language features in the learners' use of target language which are not recognized within the theory of transfer. Corder (1994: 20) refers to "such phenomena as the avoidance of the use of certain features of the target language by the speakers of certain mother tongues. The absence or rarity of something can scarcely be the result of a process of transfer."

In the same work, Corder (1994: 20) gives details of language acquisition when influence of the mother tongue takes place. He sees language acquisition as creating a body of implicit knowledge which works as a basis for utterances in the language. Language acquisition is a creative process where learners make an internal representation of the language by interacting with the language of the environment. This internal representation consists of the regularities of the language that they discover from the language input and is known as interlanguage competence. Such competence changes and develops as long as learners continue to learn the language and receive sufficient input.

The developmental sequence in the target language is similar for both adults and children. Though this developmental sequence is independent of external processes like teaching or instruction, it is not completely free from internal processes like the knowledge of the mother tongue. Corder (1994: 21) views the knowledge of mother tongue "as a cognitive element in the process" which "might reasonably be expected to affect decisively in the order of developmental sequence." He admits that this has also been similar to the "classical" position as viewed by Lado (1964). That means the range of similarity or dissimilarity between the target and native language can necessarily make the acquisition of target language easier or harder respectively. The idea is that the more similar L1 and L2 are in their linguistic features, the quicker and easier will be the acquisition of L2 and vice versa. However, Corder here makes two points for the sake of clarification. In the earlier stage of acquisition in L2, mother tongue influence does not play a crucial role but it does have a significant role in the later development of L2. Some languages are learned more easily and quickly than other languages by the speakers of a particular language. A Bengali speaker can learn Hindi or Urdu more easily than English. This testifies to the existence of language family or language distance. If the target language is more distant from the native language in linguistic aspects, it will take both more time and

effort from the learner to acquire it and vice versa. Corder disagrees with the use of the term 'interference' if there is less or no similarity between L1 and L2. He calls this 'little facilitation' but not 'inhibition' or 'interference'.

2.4 Language distance:

The idea that linguistically distant languages take a long time to be learned is illustrated by Odlin (1989). Though there is very little research in support of this view, data from the Foreign Service Institute (1985) of the U.S. State Department give proof of this phenomenon. Various length of language courses were offered to members of the U.S. diplomatic corps. The aim of these courses was to improve language competence at an equal level among learners of each language. The following list shows that all these languages were of varying levels of difficulty to native speakers of English.

Table 1: Level of language difficulty around the world

| Language | Number of Weeks | Language | Number of Weeks |
|-----------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Afrikaans | 24 | Indonesian | 32 |
| Amharic | 44 | Italian | 20 |
| Arabic | 44 | Japanese | 44 |
| Bengali | 44 | Korean | 44 |
| Bulgarian | 44 | Lao | 44 |
| Burmese | 44 | Malay | 32 |
| Chinese | 44 | Norwegian | 24 |
| Czech | 44 | Pilipino | 44 |
| Danish | 24 | Polish | 44 |
| Dari | 44 | Portuguese | 24 |
| Dutch | 24 | Rumanian | 24 |
| Finnish | 44 | Russian | 44 |
| French | 20 | Serbo-Croatian | 44 |
| German | 20 | Spanish | 20 |
| Greek | 44 | Swahili | 24 |
| Hebrew | 44 | Swedish | 24 |
| Hindi | 44 | Thai | 44 |
| Hungarian | 44 | Turkish | 44 |
| | | Urdu | 44 |

(Quoted from Odlin: 1989: 39)

It can be seen from this list that learners who had spent forty four weeks of learning Bangla were supposed to be of the same proficiency level as learners who had spent twenty weeks in learning French or German. Thus the existence of language distance becomes clearly evident from this list.

2.5 The Superset and the Subset Principle:

The Superset and the Subset principles give some account of language influence in relation to language distance. The Superset principle contains all the probable examples or steps of a norm whereas the Subset principle contains only part of it. In learning a language, learners seem to assume a limited grasp of grammar first, that is, the grammar of a Subset principle either for the mother tongue or for the Subset principle itself. Then from the input or from the instruction, learners correct themselves according to the exact rules of the language.

To clarify these two terms, Gass & Selinker (2001: 172) have used the numerical system. The norm for the counting system is 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10.. Now if a person is a member of this society, he will learn this system for counting. Again if another person is a member of a society where the counting system consists only of even numbers, i.e. 2,4,6,8,10..... then this second system is the Subset of the first system which is the Superset one. Now if a person from the first society moves to the second one, he will find no use of 1, 3,5,7,9. This person may think that these odd numbers might be possible in this new society but accidentally he is not hearing them. Only when someone tells him that odd numbers are not possible at all, may he correct it. Otherwise there is no way for him to learn about it from the input. On the other hand, if a person from the second group moves to the first society he will find the use of new information 1,3,5,7,9 and will therefore modify his previous system with this new system. Here he does not need any instructor to tell him this fact because he will find this information from the input. Thus Gass and Selinker (2001:172) comes to the conclusion that "moving from a Subset system to a Superset system requires only that the information be available from the input, whereas moving from a Superset system to Subset system requires additional information (e.g. correction or some prior knowledge about language counting possibilities)." From this explanation given by Gass & Selinker, we can assume that similar things can happen in language learning. Speakers of a language with a Subset grammatical system have to learn many new rules of the target language with a Superset grammar whereas speakers from a language with a Superset grammar have to learn about what cannot appear in the target language with Subset grammar.

3. Literature review on Probable areas of L1 influence:

There has been a considerable body of individual research on semantic and syntactic transfer, phonetics and phonological transfer of various languages to see whether their production of English as a second language has been influenced

by the mother tongue. While such research has been very specific, this paper has different agenda to find as many probable areas of influence as there can be from Bengali to English.

3.1 Semantics and Morphology:

Odlin (1989) has rightly pointed out the nexus between language and thought. Even while learning a second language, learners use their native language for cognitive activities. While it is an open question of how much semantic influence there can be from the native language to the target language, "research does suggest that cross-linguistic differences in structure sometimes reflect differences in thinking" (Odlin 1989:72). Odlin (1989) also talks about semantic case, the use of the genitive (possessive) either as a prepositional phrase or as a bound morpheme. Besides, with regard to Bengali speakers, there are other issues like the use of empty subjects.

Nan Jiang has replicated his previous study of Chinese and English language (2002) with Korean and English (2004) with more detailed experiments to support his hypothesis of semantic transfer. In his recent study, he shows that Korean speakers have performed a semantic judgment task with "two types of related word pairs, some shared the same Korean translation and some did not." Korean speakers responded to the same-translation word pairs faster than the different-translation word pairs. The quick response to the same-translation word pairs was taken as evidence for L1 (Korean) semantic transfer to the processing, identification and use of L2 (English) words.

3.2 Syntax:

Various syntactic categories have to be considered in discussing syntactic influence. Odlin (1989: 85) has talked about word order rigidity, branching direction in relative clauses, formation of negative sentences and interrogative sentences and the use of contracted forms of words in negative and interrogative sentences.

In his research on Syntactic Transfer, Chan (2004) has focused on five errors types: (a) lack of control of the copula; (b) incorrect placement of adverbs; (c) inability to use 'there be' structure for expressing an existential or presentative function; (d) failure to use the relative clause; (e) confusion in verb transitivity. The result of his study demonstrates that many learners have a tendency to think in their native language (Chinese) first before they produce any utterance in L2 (English). The word order or syntactic structures in their use of English were "identical or very similar to the usual or normative sentence of the learners' first language (L1), Cantonese" (Chan 2004). In the use of complex structures of L2,

syntactic transfers from L1 were particularly common. These transfers were found among learners with lower proficiency levels. However, highly proficient learners were also found making syntactic transfer when they found it difficult to use the target language structure.

3.3 Phonetics and Phonology:

Two languages may have similar sound systems which may vary significantly in their physical characteristics "including both acoustic characteristics (e.g. the pitch of sound) and articulatory characteristics (how widely the mouth is open in producing a sound)" (Odlin 1989: 112). In a longitudinal study, Keys (2002) found that Brazilian students of EFL tended to palatalize the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/. They make this sound more palatalized as /tʃ/ when the /t/ sound is followed by the oral vowels /i/ or /ɪ/. This feature is allowed in the Brazilian Portuguese language and is transferred into English in circumstances when it is allowed (/t+/fj/ => /tʃ/). However, these learners also tended to palatalize the /t/ sound when it was followed by a vowel like /ʊ, u/ which is allowed neither in Brazilian Portuguese nor in English. But Keys has observed that learners make such errors in both their L1 and L2. For example, they produce /tʃju/ for /tu:/ in their English. Thus the author comes to the conclusion that this tendency "contravenes the L1 rule for palatalization." (Keys 2002). Therefore the phonetic aspect of L2 is influenced by the mother tongue here.

Odlin has also mentioned phonemic differences, segmental errors (i.e. errors concerning vowel and consonant), supra-segmental errors regarding stress, tone rhythm and other factors. According to him, stress patterns in pronunciation are essential for listeners to recognize a word "since they affect syllables and the segments that constitute certain nouns and verbs such as between COMbine and comBINE" (Odlin 1989: 116). Thus he concludes that if stress patterns of the target language are not maintained in the production of speech, it may result in confusion and misperception of utterances (1989: 116). Odlin also mentions Bansal's (1976) opinion about English in India where unintelligibility and misidentification mostly arises due to errors in stress patterns in English pronunciation. Keeping in mind all these issues, a comparison between Bengali and English can be made in terms of initial clusters, aspirated and non-aspirated sounds etc.

4. The Present Study

4.1 Aims & hypothesis:

The aim of this paper is to investigate those areas in which Bangla is different from English and notes whether these differences have any influence on spoken English proficiency among Bangla speakers. Languages can be different from one another in almost every linguistic feature, such as phonetics, phonology,

phonotactics, syntax and semantics. There has been research done in each of these features in various languages of the world in relation to English, but no such research has been done on the linguistic relationship between Bangla and English, at least not on the subject of what and how linguistic features of Bangla language can influence the standard of spoken English among Bangladeshi students.

It has been found that when Bangla speakers talk in English, they take time to think and to articulate these ideas through speech. The less proficient they are, the more time they take for thinking and preparing, and vice versa. Their English speech is influenced by some linguistic errors caused by the differences between Bangla and English. This essay tries to justify the hypotheses that

- (i) there is influence of Bengali (L1) on the spoken English (L2) proficiency among Bangladeshi learners; and
- (ii) the most proficient English language users are least or not influenced at all by Bangla.

4.2 Methodology:

An interview method was adopted for collecting samples of spoken English from Bangladeshi students. Interviews were taken on an individual basis for each interviewee. The interview sessions were not controlled since the purpose of this paper was to collect samples of spontaneous ability in spoken English. Each interview session continued for 15 minutes to one hour duration when various issues such as culture, education etc. in both Sweden³ and Bangladesh were discussed. Each interview session was recorded carefully for the purpose of data analysis. Participants knew that their speech was being recorded. All the participants in these interviews were graduates from various Bangladeshi institutes studying in various post graduate programmes in different Swedish institutes. Three of them were studying in the MA programme in English with ⁴IELTS score of 7. The fourth student was a PhD research student with IELTS score of 6. The fifth student was doing his M.Sc. in International Finance with 5 IELTS band score and the sixth student was doing his M.Sc. in European Political Sociology with no IELTS score. The rationale for selecting participants of various proficiency levels was to investigate whether Bangla influence on spoken English may vary due to various proficiency levels.

5. Bangla Influence on Spoken English & Data analysis

Being a member of a language family that is quite distant from English, Bangla has very different linguistic characteristics from English. This eventually affects learners' performance with 'little facilitation' (Corder 1994) or 'negative transfer' (Odlin 1989). There are errors in the use of English of the Bangla speakers which are related to the linguistic rules and aspects of Bangla language. These

presences of Bangla linguistic features are more common in spontaneous speech or informal dialogue than in formal speech which is revised several times for correction prior to actual production.

5.1 Morphology and Semantics:

5.1.1 Third person singular number rule:

In English, the form of the verb varies depending on the person and number of the subject such as *I eat rice* but *He eats rice*. In Bangla, although the form of the verb varies in relation to the person of the subject, no such variation occurs in relation to the number of the person. That is, in Bangla there is no morphological inflection of verb forms in relation to the third person singular number. Examples for comparisons are given below:

(a) *tara bhat khay.*

[tara b^ha_ɬkhay]⁵

They eat rice.

(b) *she bhat khay.*

[ʃe b^ha_ɬkhay]

She/he eats rice.

Similar is the case for the verb *be* i.e. there is no need to change the form of verbs in Bangla for singular or plural number. For example,

(a) *ami chilam.*

[ami chɪlam]

I was.

(b) *amra chilam*

[amra chɪlam]

We were.

(c) *she chilo*

[ʃe chɪlo]

She/he was.

(d) *tara chilo*

[tara chɪlo]

They were.

Since there is no such morphological inflection or change of verb forms for third person singular number, Bangla speakers have to learn this as a Superset principle while learning English from the input. It happens that even after seventeen years of exposure to such input through class lectures in the form of

instruction, reading materials and listening to materials, they often fail to maintain this third person singular verb marker in their use of English. Therefore, this error of third person singular number can be attributed to the non-existence of such rules in Bengali language. In other words, learners use the L1 rule in their use of L2. This influence has taken place in the speech of both higher and lower level English users in the recorded interview:

- (a) *All the cultures in Bangladesh is colourful.*
- (b) *What was the places of that travel?*
- (c) *There is many many things.*
- (d) *Because she love me too much.*
- (e) *He give me huge time.*

5.1.2 Use of plural number:

In the use of plural number in English, both the determiner and the main word (i.e. noun) become plural in form, for example, *a worker* but *some workers* and *a man* but *many men*. But in Bangla, the plural marker is used either before the noun as a pre-determiner or after the noun as plural inflection but not both at the same time. For example:

⁶*onek manush*

[ɔnek mānu]

Many men.

⁷*onekgulo manush*

[ɔnekgulo mānu]era]

Many men.

(but never as *⁸*onek manushera* = [ɔnek mānu]era] or *⁹*onekgulo manushera* = [ɔnekgulo mānu]era]

manushera [mānu]era] /*manushgulo*[mānu]gulo]

(*men / men')

This difference of plural marker between English and Bengali leads to errors like missing one plural marker either at the pre-determiner position or at the end of the head word as inflection. Such errors found in the conversation are:

- (a) *What happens on this days?*
- (b) *Some kinds of industry.*
- (c) *Some organization.*
- (d) *Many tourist*

5.1.3 Gender-based Pronoun:

Again, in English, the third person singular pronoun varies in terms of gender such as *he/she*, *him/her* and *his/her*. However, no such variation occurs in Bangla language, i.e. both masculine and feminine gender share the same form of pronoun for 'he/she' such as '*she*' (pronounced as /ʃe/). The object form for 'him/her' is '*take*' (pronounced as /take/) and possessive form for 'his/her' is – '*tar*' (pronounced as /tar/-'his/her'). This lack of gender based pronouns in Bangla influences learners to make errors like saying '*he*' for '*she*' and '*she*' for '*he*'. For example, in talking about his girl friend, one interviewee said:

I think Uni, he is my best friend.

He advised me and she helped me to go abroad. (to refer to the same lady)

However, this error is more frequent among speakers at lower levels of proficiency though it may occur as a slip of the tongue for even higher level of users.

5.1.4 Use of empty subject:

Unlike English there is no use of an empty subject like *it* or *there* to express impersonal action or existential position. Examples in English are *It rains* and *There are many universities in Dhaka*. But in Bangla no such empty subjects can be found. Rather impersonal subject or existential place or objects themselves become subject. Examples of such Bangla sentences are as follows:

(a) *bristi porche*

[brɪʃti pɔʃche]

Rain is falling.

It is raining.

(b) *dhakay onek biswabiddaloy acche*

[dhakay ɔnek bisʃʃobiddalɔy acche]

There are many universities in Dhaka.

Less proficient speakers in conversation do not use such *there-be* structure in order to show existential location. By using some phrases one speaker has said that there are royal palaces and other girls' college in his district in the following way:

Royal palace, other girls' colleges here.

5.2 Syntax

5.2.1 Word order:

The main difference in the syntax of Bangla and English lies in their word order. English is a SVO (Subject + Verb + Object) language whereas Bangla is a SOV (Subject + Object + Verb) language. This basic difference in word order often

creates errors of wrong placement of verbs and adverbs in a sentence. In English adverbs may be placed either before or after the main verb depending on the meaning and context for example, *he walks slowly* and *he always walks slowly*. In Bangla, adverbs always come before the verb, and if there is any adjective or noun (as object) preceding the verb, the adverb will appear in between the subject and object. Example:

(a) *ami jore dourai*

[ami jore dou[ai]

I run fast.

(b) *ami khub phool bhalobashi*

[ami khub ful b^halobashi]

I like flower very much.

This difference in the placement of adverbs can explain the wrong use of adverbs like *I very liked because it was my first university life* produced by the least proficient speaker of the conversation.

5.2.2 Use of auxiliary verbs:

Auxiliary verbs in all tenses are the basic markers of tenses in English. To show tense variation in English, these auxiliary verbs are changed with the form of the main verb as well. For example: *I am eating rice* and *I have eaten rice*. However, there is no such rule or use of auxiliary verbs in Bangla.¹⁰ Examples for analysis are as follows:

(a) *ami bhat khacchi*. (Present Progressive)

[ami b^hat khacchi]

I am eating rice.

(b) *ami bhat kheyecchi*. (Present Perfect)

[ami b^hat kheyechi]

I have eaten rice.

This difference between Bangla and English directly influences all the learners at the initial stage and less proficient learners all stages so that they omit auxiliary verbs in their use of tense and passive voice in English. The less proficient speakers among the six interviewees made errors like:

(a) *Asia country, others country ___ just going on, developing on.*

(b) *When I ___ admitted Dhaka University.*

(c) *We ___ passing time.*

(d) *They ___ facing many problems.*

5.2.3 Formation of negative and interrogative sentence:

The lack of auxiliary verbs also inevitably affects the negative and the question sentence formation. In English, negative sentences are formed by using 'not' after the auxiliary or linking verbs (in the case of more than one auxiliary verbs, it appears after the first auxiliary verb) and by using 'no' in between the main verb and noun. For example, *He does not go home; He has no friend; He is not a good man.*

But in Bangla, the negative word is used after the main verb or adjective (to show disagreement) or after the noun (to show non existence).¹¹ Examples are like:

(a) *ami bhat khai na.*

[ami b^hat khai na]

I rice eat not.

I do not eat rice.

(b) *ami bhalo nei.*

[ami b^halo nei]

I well not.

I am not well.

(c) *tar taka nei.*

[tar taka nei]

His money not have.

He has no money.

This difference in the formation of negative sentence often results in the placement of 'not' after adjective or noun among the Bangla speakers. An example can be given from a comment made by the lower proficient speaker of English about his university: "very good not, very bad not." which is a word-by-word translation of Bengali syntactic word order.

The effect of the non-existence of auxiliary verbs in Bangla can also be seen in question formation in English. In English, subject-verb inversion is mandatory in yes/no question whereas in 'wh'-questions, a wh- word is used at the beginning of a sentence with this subject-verb inversion. In Bangla, a separate word is used after the subject for making yes/no question sentence but no subject-verb inversion is necessary. In terms of 'wh' questions, a separate word is used for various 'wh' words and here also no subject-verb inversion occurs. Examples for comparison can be shown in the following way:

(a) *tumi ¹²ki jao?*

[tumi ki j^o]

You *do* go?

Do you go?

(b) *tumi kothai jao?*

[tumɪ kot^hay jɑu]

You where go?

Where do you go?

5.3 Phonetics and Phonology:

5.3.1 Near similar sounds:

Phonetics and phonology are the main parts of direct L1 influence on the pronunciation of target language. Starting with phonetics, there are articulatory similarities in the utterance of some English sounds but some particular sounds are different from the target language sound in a very little but critical way in terms of place and manner of articulation. The nearer these similarities are in using articulatory organs for producing a sound, the more the replacement of the L2 sounds occurs with L1 sounds. This replacement of L2 sounds with L1 endows the utterances with particular characteristics and as such one can identify Indian English, Chinese English or African English. However, learners of higher proficiency may often eradicate this L1 influence if they are more attentive to the production of particular sound and if they are more exposed to the native English speech.

There are some sounds in English which are more similar to some sounds in Bangla but which involve different articulatory organs. For example, English has labio-dental sounds like /f/ and /v/ whereas Bangla has the bilabial stops /p^h/ and /b^h/ in addition to /p/ and /b/. It happens that in pronouncing those two English sounds, Bangla speakers use both their lips instead of using the upper teeth and the lower lip. Therefore all words with these sounds are heard as aspirated bilabial plosives rather than /f/ or /v/ to native English speakers. Example words can be given from the conversation like *fine, very, fish*, etc.

The English sounds like /z/ /dʒ/ and /ʒ/ are similar to two types of /z/ and /dʒ/ sounds in Bangla. But a sound like /ʒ/ often creates problem for all types of learners at the initial level. They cannot often produce the actual /ʒ/ sound in the word like 'vision'. They produce this sound either akin to /dʒ/ or /ʒ/. So here also confusion may arise to the listener due to this mispronunciation.

5.3.2 Consonant cluster:

Many word-initial consonantal clusters are simplified according to Bangla phonotactics. A common tendency is to use a short vowel sound before these initial consonantal clusters. Words like

| Words | British | Influenced by Bangla or dialects of Bangla |
|----------------|-----------|--|
| <i>special</i> | /ˈspeɪʃl/ | /ɪspeɪʃal/ |
| <i>Spain</i> | /ˈspeɪn/ | /ɪspeɪn/ |
| <i>station</i> | /ˈsteɪʃn/ | /ɪstɛʃɔn/ |
| <i>school</i> | /ˈsku:l/ | /ɪskul/ |

In final clusters also, there is a tendency of failing to reduce unstressed vowels. While this failure may be due to spelling-type pronunciation, it is even found among the highly proficient speakers, though it may be more among the less proficient speakers. For example, a similar chart can be shown in this feature in the following way:

| Words | British | Influenced by Bengali |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Literature</i> | /ˈlɪtrətʃə/ | /lɪtarecar/ |
| <i>National</i> | /ˈnæʃnəl/ | /næʃonal/ |
| <i>Situation</i> | /sɪtʃuˈeɪʃn/ | /sɪcueʃɔn/ |
| <i>Generalisation</i> | /dʒenərəlaɪˈzeɪʃn/ | /ʃenaralarɛʃon/ |

5.3.3 Pronunciation of /r/ sound:

In the pronunciation of the /r/ sound, the English language allows several ways of uttering it depending on the position in a word. /r/ is pronounced before vowel sounds particularly at the word initial and word medial position whereas the word final /r/ is not pronounced unless it is followed by a vowel. On the other hand, rhoticism is clearly present in Bangla i.e. the /r/ sound is pronounced independent of its position in a word. This difference becomes explicit in the utterance of some English words among the Bengali speakers:

| Words | British | Influenced by Bangla |
|------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| <i>River</i> | /rɪvə(r)/ | /rɪb ^h ar/ |
| <i>Personal</i> | /ˈpɜːsənəl/ | /parsonal/ |
| <i>Departure</i> | /dɪpɑːtʃə(r)/ | /dɪparcar/ |

5.3.4 Word stress:

In some supra-segmental sectors as well, the Bangla influence is strongly present especially in the word stress. All the speech of the subjects is devoid of English word stress or if their speech has any stress, those are more similar to Bangla. To notice this, some individual words can be mentioned below:

| Words | British | Influenced by Bangla |
|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Tourist</i> | /tu:rɪst/ /turɪst/ | |
| <i>People</i> | /pi:pl/ | /piupol/ |
| <i>Carpet</i> | /ka:pɪt/ /karpet/ | |
| <i>Culture</i> | /kaltʃə(r) | /kalcar/ |
| <i>Industry</i> | /ɪndʌstri/ | /ɪndastrɪ/ |

However this is less found among the speakers who are more exposed to native English speaking environment for a longer period of time.

6. Discussion:

Cross-linguistic influence has been the research domain for many years. How much of this influence is present in the actual English speech of the Bangla speakers is the focal point of this essay. Probable areas of this influence have been discussed in section two. Most areas of such influence are due to the Superset and the Subset principles existing between these two languages. In the third section, major linguistic differences between these two languages have been focused with concrete examples found in the data analysis of the recorded sample of English speech from the Bangla speakers. In semantics and morphology, English has got plural markers with pre-determiner, head word and other related words directly linked to the noun phrase and it results in the subject-verb agreement with the verb. On the contrary, in Bangla, the plural marker is used either with the pre-determiner or with the head word but not with both at the same time. This results in the mistake of absence of plural marker either at the pre-determiner position or at the head word position in the use of English among the Bangla speakers. Further there is no verb inflection for using the third person singular number in Bengali. This has major influence in the use of English among the Bangla speakers. They often miss or forget to add such morphological inflection to the main verb for the third person singular number in their English speech.

Table: 2 Numbers of Errors in Semantics & Morphology

| | Level of Proficiency | 3 rd Person Singular Number | Plural Number | 'There be' structure | Total Error of each individual |
|-----------|----------------------|--|---------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Speaker 1 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Speaker 2 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Speaker 3 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Speaker 4 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Speaker 5 | 5.5 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 10 |
| Speaker 6 | No IELTS | 6 | 5 | 3 | 14 |

Use of empty subjects are also absent in Bangla which takes extra effort from the learner to absorb them. However it cannot be said for sure from the conversation whether these are influenced by Bangla or not. Again gender-based pronouns are also absent in Bangla and for this reason learners often make mistake in using s/he in talking about male and female. The categorizations of error of each individual interviewee can be shown in the table 2. For the reliability purpose of the result some issues like gender based pronoun and the use of empty subjects have not been included in the table. This has been done since these did not appear in all the conversations or were uncertain in terms of L1 influence.

In syntax, the basic word order of Bangla (SOV) and English (SVO) are discussed. This difference results in the wrong placement of adverbs or verbs. Again the concept of auxiliary verbs in all tenses is a complete Superset idea for Bangla people learning English. As a result they often forget to use auxiliary verbs in their natural fluent conversation.

Bangla is a post-verbal negative language where negative word is used after the main verb or after the noun or adjectives. This Bangla linguistic feature is also present in the English speech of the Bangla speakers which can be seen as an L1 influence. However this has been found in one example made by the least proficient speakers. In question formation, there is no subject-verb inversion in the Bangla language. But rather a separate question word is used depending on the type of information and question one wants to make. This results in the absence of subject-verb inversion with the occasional omission of the auxiliary verb. In syntax also, the categorizations of error of each individual interviewee can be seen in the table below. Here again, for the sake of reliability of the result some issues like the use of question formation have not been shown in the table since questions mainly came from the interviewer in all the interviews and all the interviewees shared in it in a conversational fashion with no or one or two questions.

Table: 3 Numbers of Errors in Syntax

| | Level of Proficiency | Use of Adverb | Use of Auxiliary | Use of Negative Sentence | Total Error |
|-----------|----------------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| Speaker 1 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Speaker 2 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Speaker 3 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Speaker 4 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Speaker 5 | 5.5 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Speaker 6 | No IELTS | 1 | 4 | 1 | 6 |

Bangla influence can clearly be noticed in the phonetics and phonology section. Near-similar sounds with different articulatory organs are the key points for discussion. Bangla speakers tend to produce sounds like /f/ and /v/ as aspirated voiced or voiceless bilabial plosives like /p^h/ and /b^h/ whereas in English they are labio-dental fricatives. The /ʒ/ sound is pronounced either as /ʃ/ or /dʒ/ but not as /ʒ/ since it has no phonetic form in Bangla. Again pronunciation of the /r/ sound and its presence in every position in English words produced by Bangla speakers is a clear L1 influence. Two features about phonetics were found to be unsure from the investigation: the insertion of vowel at the beginning of English consonant clusters by the Bangla speakers and the failure to reduce the vowel quality during pronouncing English words. These two features may be either due to Bangla language where these are common trends or due to simplification of pronunciation according to spelling. However, the former is more likely to be Bangla influence since there are rules like *shwarabhakti* or *biprokercho*. According to these rules, words of consonant clusters are simplified by a process of vowel insertion in between the consonants of a cluster. For example,

Chandra (the moon) *Chondor* *Chaand*
Priti (amity) *Piriti* *Pirit*

Table of errors can also be shown for illustration if utterances of sounds can be treated as right or wrong. It is worth mentioning that all the interviewees of different proficiency levels of this paper are highly influenced by the L1 in different phonetic and phonological aspects. However, one can find the effect of individual proficiency here as well:

Table: 3 Numbers of Errors in Phonetics and Phonology

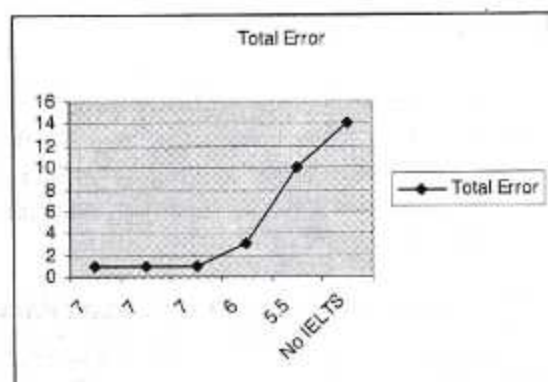
| | Level of Proficiency | /f/ /v/ as /p ^h / /b ^h / | /ʒ/ as /ʃ/ or /dʒ/ | Use of /r/ Sound | Consonant. cluster | Stress Patterns | Total Error |
|-----------|----------------------|--|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Speaker 1 | 7 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 17 |
| Speaker 2 | 7 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 16 |
| Speaker 3 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 18 |
| Speaker 4 | 6 | 7 | 4 | 7 | 4 | 7 | 29 |
| Speaker 5 | 5.5 | 8 | 5 | 8 | 5 | 8 | 34 |
| Speaker 6 | No IELTS | 10 | 5 | 10 | 6 | 9 | 40 |

Data for this paper has been collected from six students studying at various institutions in Sweden. All of them are adults, graduates with various levels of English proficiency from IELTS band score of five to seven. In the analysis of

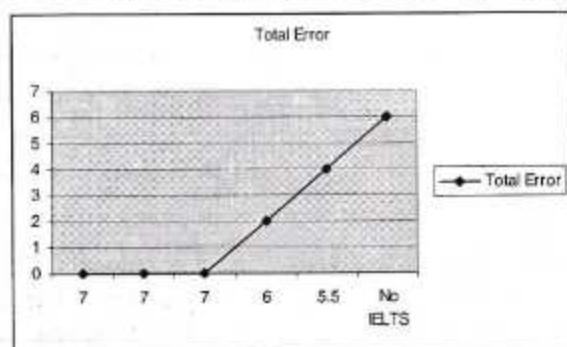
data, it has been found that errors due to L1 influence are present in the speech of all levels of students. While students with higher proficiency make some occasional errors in the subject verb agreement particularly in the third person singular number and plural number, students of lower proficiency levels made errors in more fundamental areas including the above ones. They made errors in the use of the there-be structure, auxiliary verbs, adverb position and in the formation of negative and question sentences. In phonetics and phonology also, the difference between high and low level speakers becomes explicit, though all of them are influenced by the L1 at a higher extent. Their way of pronouncing English sounds, words and above all sentences is different from the native English in terms of articulatory devices, stress and intonation.

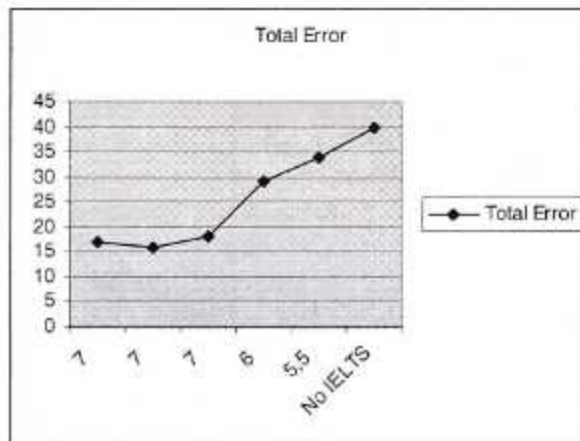
It has been noticed in this investigation that examples of Bangla influence in the use of English come more from less proficient speakers. All the tables for semantics, syntax, phonetics and phonology can be presented in graphs for a clear picture of L1 influence which may vary from low proficiency level to high proficiency level.

Graph: 1 Numbers of Errors and L1 influence in Semantics & Morphology



Graph: 2 Numbers of Errors and L1 influence in Syntax



Graph: 3 Numbers of Errors and L1 influence in Phonetics and

Phonology

While more proficient speakers are also influenced in some morphological features and phonetics and phonology, low proficient speakers are more influenced in all features like morphology, syntax, phonetics and phonology. The essay has tried to find the difference between occasional performance errors by individual person and general errors due to linguistic differences found between Bangla and English. By avoiding the errors due to individual speakers' weakness in English language, this essay has mainly focused on the common errors made by all learners and has tried to scrutinize those errors whether they bear any Bangla influence. Although this essay has also considered that the speakers might have focused more on meaning and message rather than accuracy, it is not likely that learners do not know the rules of English in their error areas. Rather they know all of those rules and even after that, in a natural fluent conversation, they cannot actively use all of those rules. So in those cases, they tend to make some mistakes and these mistakes are clearly marked by the presence of some Bangla linguistic characteristics. While the less proficient speakers have made these errors more in number, they have also tended to make some unusual errors which are neither due to Bengali nor due to English language.

7. Conclusion

The essay has found that Bangla influence is present in actual English speech taken from Bangla speakers. Bangla influence is present in the speech of all levels of proficiency among the Bangla speakers. The first hypothesis of presence of Bangla influence is supported here. Again more proficient speakers have made fewer mistakes in limited aspects in morphology with Bangla phonetic and phonological influence. In contrast to them, less proficient speakers have made more errors in morphology, syntax and they are also influenced by Bangla in

phonetics and phonology. Thus the second hypothesis, that is, the most proficient English language users are least or not influenced at all by Bangla is also supported. This essay has been written on the basis of actual data collected from a limited number of students. However, for a generalized and universal acceptance of these two hypotheses, data from large number of students (both young and adult), teachers (both novice and experienced) and other professional people can be collected in addition to some experimental research. Again samples of English speech from both the native speakers of English and the Bangladeshi ESL learners can be compared for more widespread recognition of these results.

From this paper, several inferences can be drawn for overcoming Bangla influence to ensure a successful English language learning situation. Both teachers and students need to have a sound knowledge of Bangla as well as awareness of these linguistic differences with English. An explicit teaching of any such differences in grammar class may raise awareness among students. Besides, intensive practice from student part is necessary at least at the beginning.

Notes

- ¹ L1= It is also known as Mother Tongue (MT), Native Language (NL).
- ² L2= The language which is learnt after L1. It is also known as Target Language (TL).
- ³ This work was done as an MA dissertation paper in Sweden.
- ⁴ IELTS= International English Language Testing System. It is often regarded as a precondition for admission in a foreign university.
- ⁵ Phonemic transcription is followed throughout this article.
- ⁶ *Onek*= many, *manush*= man
- ⁷ *Onekgulo*= many; *gulo* is used as inflected plural marker either after the noun or after the previous plural marker.
- ⁸ *onek manushera*>many men. Usually it is not used though it may rarely appear in a speech for emphasis.
- ⁹ *onekgulo manushera*> many men. It is never possible.
- ¹⁰ However, it is worth mentioning that Bangla has various compound verbs (infinitive + finite) which serve different auxiliary verb patterns.
- ¹¹ This regular position for negative word changes in conditional sentences where the word order pattern is SONV e.g. *jodi ami na jai, tahole ki korbe?*
- ¹² *ki*-is a Bangla interrogative particle. It is also used as the meaning for *what*.

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